

## Chapter 5 - Women's Peace Movement

teachers' notes

### in brief

This chapter considers the sometime forgotten contribution of women involved in the resistance to the war and to conscription as well as their support for conscientious objectors. It shows how, by drawing upon experiences of involvement in the suffragette movement, women took on prominent roles in organising and mobilising opposition to the war; it also acknowledges the personal consequences for some women as a result of their leadership of and participation in anti-war work.

The initial sections articulate the activities of some key activists within the parameters of the No Conscription Fellowship (NCF), their ingenuity in ensuring that the NCF paper *The Tribunal* continued to be printed in the last two years of the war and the personal sacrifice that these activities entailed.

The chapter also recognises the international characteristic of the women's peace movement by describing the establishment of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom and the incredible organisational and brave feat of holding a Women's International Congress at the Hague during the war itself. The final section describes the way socialist and working class women organised within the Women's Peace Crusade.

### learning objectives by sub-section

Students will be able to:

#### 5.1 women and the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF)

-describe the purpose of the NCF, describe how women ensured effective communication and explain why the authorities tried to prevent the work of the NCF.

#### 5.2 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF)

- describe how a significant proportion of the British suffrage movement opposed the war and organised within peace groups including the WILPF to draw up an outline of the principles needed for a successful peace settlement and compare the action of these women with those who championed peace in subsequent conflicts.

### questions and answers

#### 5.1 Women and the NO-Conscription Fellowship (NCF)

1. Describe the purpose of the NCF and indicate how, following the introduction of conscription, women ensured continuing effective communication throughout the war.

**The NCF was an organisation that was established to oppose conscription and support men of military age and their families who wished to resist conscription; women worked to monitor the plight of conscientious objectors, prepare publicity campaigns and ensure the continued publication of the NCF newspaper, *The Tribunal*.**

2. Why do you think the authorities persecuted women who were publicising opposition to conscription inside and outside the armed forces?

**The authorities were afraid that if soldiers and civilians were made aware that people were opposed to the war and that their stance was admired in the armed forces then it would have an adverse impact upon morale in the army and therefore the ability of the government to prosecute the war.**

3. What were the personal effects experienced by women when working in the NCF

Women who worked for the NCF were extremely committed to its principles; some became ill with stress, and some were imprisoned for their beliefs

4. Women worked in ingenious ways to keep the NCF newspaper, *The Tribunal* published and distributed. Nowadays there are a lot more ways of communicating effectively with people. Imagine you are living in a country which is at war and where conscription for men and women is in place and where opposition to the war is banned. What strategies and methods might you use to try and make your voice known in opposition to this war? (This activity may be undertaken in groups)

### Students' own answers

5. Sometimes it is important to be brief when trying to make a point. Write a personal statement opposing the introduction of conscription in 1916 using only 140 characters.

### Students' own answers

## 5.2 Women's International League for Peace and Freedom

1. Describe how the WILPF developed.

The WILPF grew out of the women's suffrage movement which had been seeking the right for women to vote. The British suffrage movement had been active both within the UK and internationally and about 50% of the leading suffragettes opposed the war and organised peace groups across the continent.

2. What was significant about the Hague Congress.

The Hague Congress was successful in bringing together women from 10 different countries including countries that were at war with each other; this at a time when travel restrictions were in place. The delegates drew up 20 resolutions that were very similar to the Covenant of the League of Nations established after the war.

3. Women have always been at the forefront of movements for peace. Do some research to find out when and why women have protested against war. Using one example of where women have opposed war prepare a brief information sheet outlining what you have found out.

#### further **RESOURCES**

[Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#)  
[PeaceWomen](#)  
[Women, War and Peace](#)  
[Women Against War](#)  
[Old Wmen Against War](#)  
[Greenham](#)

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